

Learning to Hunt

Hosting a hunting-
based outdoor skills
event in your
community



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On the Wing

Trap, skeet and sporting clays

Participants get hands-on experience shooting a shotgun at moving clay targets.



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Objectives

Participants shall:

demonstrate proper use of a shotgun.

demonstrate proper stance and follow-through.

demonstrate an ability to hit moving targets.

Equipment

5 20-gauge shotguns

Examples of different actions of shotguns

25 rounds of target load ammunition per participant

25 clay targets per participant

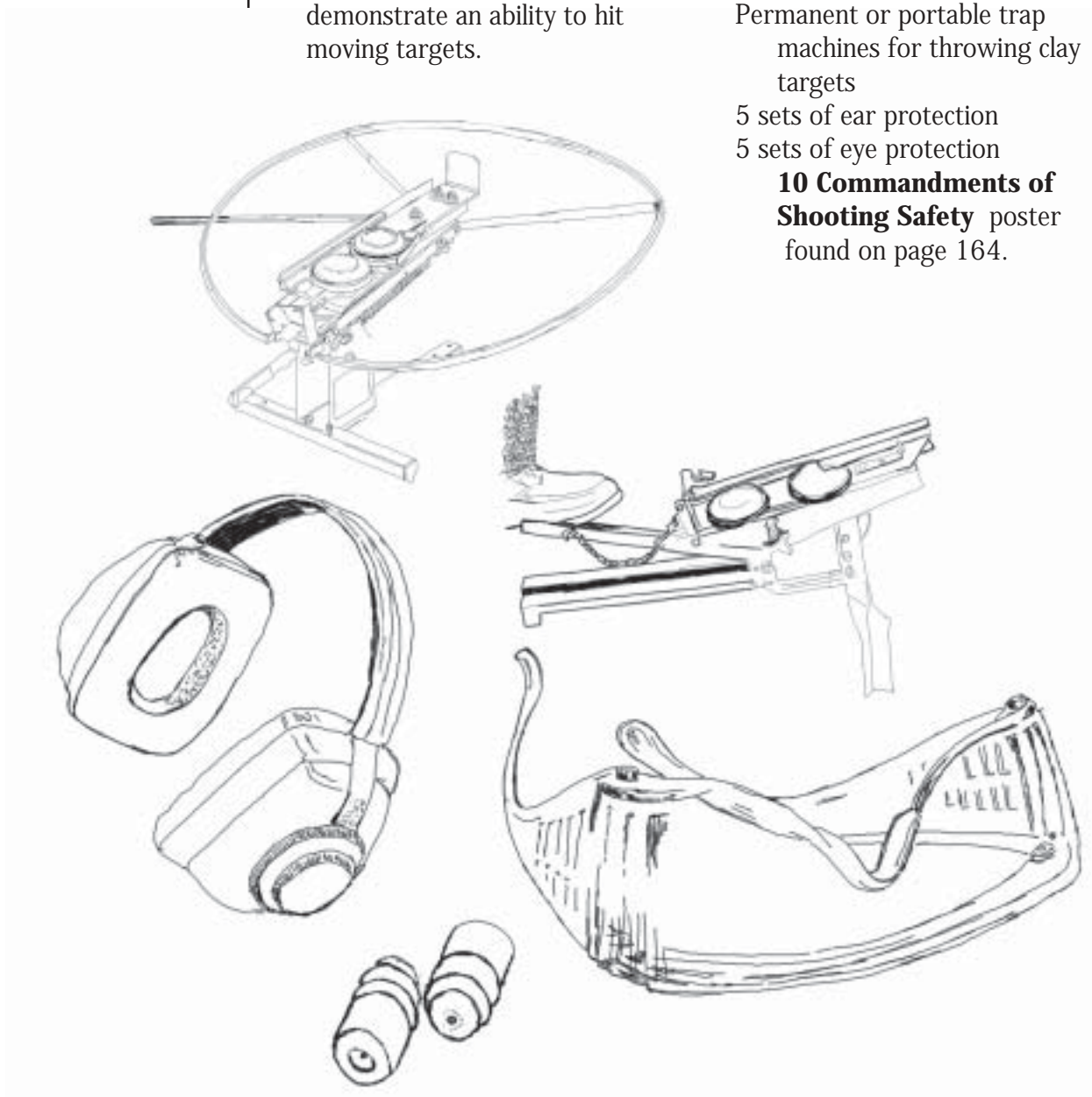
5 wooden shooting stages made of 2x4s and plywood

Permanent or portable trap machines for throwing clay targets

5 sets of ear protection

5 sets of eye protection

10 Commandments of Shooting Safety poster found on page 164.



Station Setup

For this activity, you will need to have a team of instructors. You will need a “Range Master” to coordinate the shooting schedule. For ultimate safety, arrange to have one volunteer Hunter Education Instructor positioned at each shooting station to coach participants with loading, firing and unloading of the firearms. You will also need some assistants to work the clay target machines.

Decide which sport—trap, skeet, or sporting clays—you want to set up. If you choose to shoot trap or skeet, then you will need to arrange for the use of your local gun club’s target range. If you want to develop a sporting clays course, then you will need to find a cooperative landowner. Set up some sporting clays stations so that the targets are thrown very high overhead to simulate the flight of ducks. Have other targets set to be thrown fast going away to resemble the flight of upland gamebirds. Set one of the throwers to throw a low, bouncing target, to simulate a rabbit. Set up some stations to simulate the flight of a covey of quail bursting from the brush. When setting up a sporting clay range, you must make certain there is a safe backstop such as a dirt embankment or that there is

plenty of unoccupied open space beyond the shooter. Also be certain that no human dwellings or activities occur in the path of stray shot. Check with your local conservation warden to make sure your firing range is safe. Block off all entries into the shooting zone.

Place eye and ear protection near each of the stations. For eyewear, include a variety of shock-resistant glasses in different shades and colors.

Prepare a large poster with the **10 Commandments of Shooting Safety** found on page 164.



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Background Information

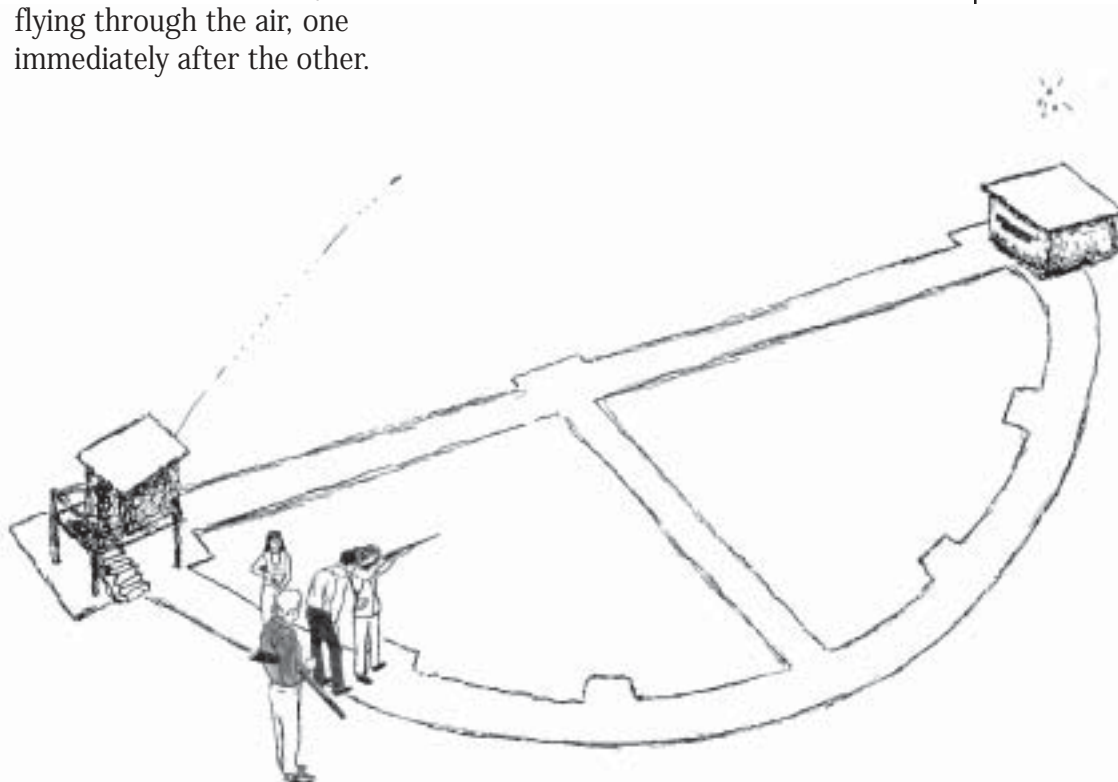
Trap is the oldest and largest clay target sport in the world. It is a long-range target game in which clay disks called “birds” are thrown from a traphouse set 16 yards in front of the shooter. It is intended to simulate field shooting at upland game birds such as pheasants. The clay targets are thrown at random angles away from the shooter. Most “birds” are broken at a range of about 35 yards. The trapshooting range is set up with five different stations set in a semi-circle facing the traphouse. Each shooter gets a chance to shoot 5 targets from each station for a total of 25 shots.



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Skeet, on the other hand, is a fast-paced, short-range target game designed to simulate field shooting at fast-moving birds such as quail, doves or teal. The course, similar to trap, is also set in a semi-circle, but it has 8 shooting stations along the route. Two traphouses, a low house and a high house, are used for releasing 25 clay birds per round. These targets fly left to right or right to left in front of the shooter. Unlike trap, where the next angle of the clay bird cannot be anticipated, each station in skeet has a fixed pattern for each clay target released. Thus, this game allows the shooter to learn consistency and control in shooting. Some stations feature two clay birds flying through the air, one immediately after the other.



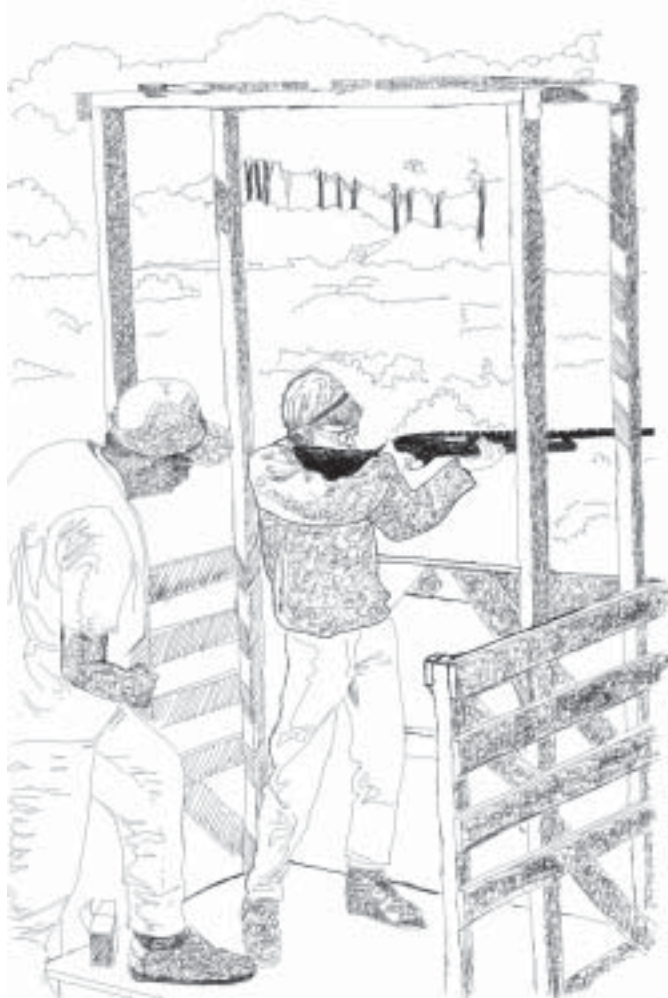
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Sporting clays, or hunter's clays, is a new shooting sport. All the targets are clay, but they can be of different size, thrown at different speeds and with different flight characteristics because of the way they are shaped. These targets more realistically simulate the flight or flee patterns of gamebirds and mammals. Unlike trap and skeet, which simulate bird hunting only, sporting clays often include stations with clay targets that roll, bounce and hop along the ground like rabbits. Stations tend to have multiple targets in the air much more often than skeet or trap.

For instance, a station may have five or six targets exploding out of a brushy area similar to a covey of quail. Some stations put a trap machine underneath the platform upon which the shooter is standing and the clay target comes out from underneath the shooter flying or rolling in an un-anticipated direction out into the woods. Every course uses the natural terrain available, so a course may be set up in the woods, in a field or in a wetland. Some targets are presented at close range, but others may be 40 or 50 yards distant.



Sporting clays offers a wider variety of shooting situations than does skeet or trap.

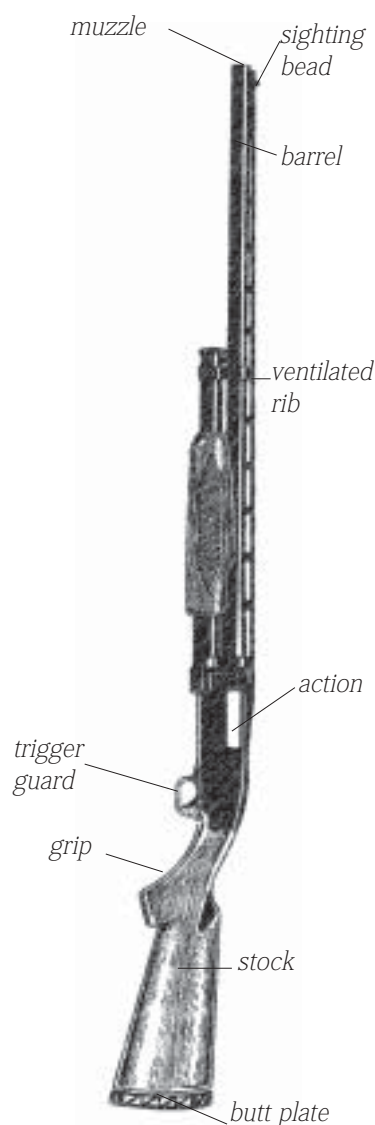
Procedure

When your group arrives, tell the participants that sometimes hunters need to shoot “on the wing.” That means that they have to shoot at moving targets. Ducks, geese, grouse, pheasants and rabbits are all hunted in this manner. Because of the inability to accurately aim with sights, shotguns are used rather than rifles. Tell your participants that they are going to have an opportunity to shoot at moving clay targets using 20-gauge shotguns. The targets will be thrown into the air or along the ground to simulate the flight or travel paths of wild gamebirds and mammals. Before getting to the actual shooting experience, review some basic firearm information and safety.

Show them the shotguns they will be using. Hold up one of the shotguns and ask participants to help you name the different parts of the gun. Ask them to point out:

Stock	Barrel
Action	Butt plate
Grip	Comb
Trigger	Trigger guard
Safety	Breech
Magazine	Tube plug
Muzzle	Sighting bead
Ventilated rib	

Ask your participants what the difference is between a shotgun and a rifle. Explain that a shotgun’s barrel is not grooved, or rifled, inside like a rifle barrel is. Also, a shotgun shoots numerous lead or steel pellets from a shotshell, rather than one solid bullet from a cartridge. The shot pellets spray out in a cone shape from the muzzle.



Activity

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The muzzle end of a shotgun can be fitted with different “chokes.” A choke is a device that narrows the exit hole at the muzzle end. A cylinder choke or no choke means that the opening is the same diameter throughout the barrel. An improved choke narrows the opening a bit. A modified choke narrows it more and a full choke closes down the opening to the smallest diameter. The effect of a choke is similar to the effect of a spray nozzle on a water hose. When the nozzle (choke) is wide open, the nozzle sprays widely, but the water droplets don’t reach very far. When the nozzle is nearly closed, as with a full choke, the stream of water is much tighter in pattern and travels much farther away. So think of chokes as squeezing the shot together in a tighter, more far-reaching cone of pellets. The smaller the opening at

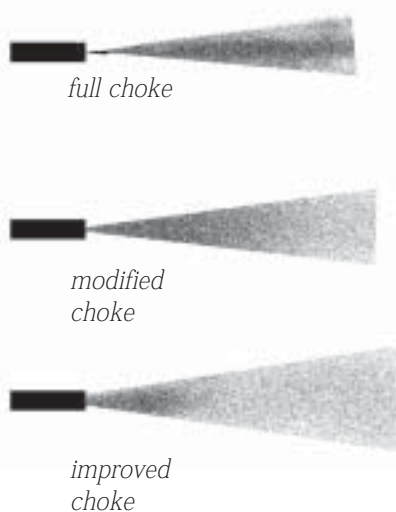
the muzzle end, the more concentrated and farther reaching the cone of shot pellets flies.

Discuss the concept of “action” on the shotgun. Demonstrate some or all of the action variations: pump, break (hinge), bolt and semi-automatic.

Ask your participants if they know what the term “20-gauge” means in reference to their gun? Explain that the term “gauge” refers to the size of the bore of the shotgun. It is measured by the number of lead balls the size of the bore that weigh one pound. For example, a 12-gauge shotgun will take 12 lead balls the diameter of the bore to equal one pound. A 20-gauge will take 20 lead balls. A 20-gauge shotgun, thus, has a smaller bore than a 12-gauge. Alternatively, have your participants think of two pies. One divided into 12 pieces, the other into 20 pieces. Which pieces will be smaller? (The pieces from the pie with 20 pieces.)

The gauge of a shotgun is stamped on the barrel of the gun. The gauge is also stamped on the brass head of a shotshell. The gauges of the shotgun and of the ammunition must match exactly. While you cannot fit a 12-gauge shotshell into the chamber of a 20-gauge shotgun, a deadly mistake can be made by putting the slimmer 20-gauge shotshell into the chamber of the wider-

Chokes



mouthed chamber of a 12-gauge shotgun. Always double check to see that your ammunition matches the gun you are using.

Before beginning the shooting experience, explain that a skilled hunter must have good vision and hearing in order to spot game and detect sounds of approaching hunters or vehicles. Hunters need to use adequate protection to avoid injuring their eyesight and hearing.

Demonstrate the proper use of ear protection. Explain that the noise on a target range may be deafening, particularly when shotguns are being fired. Beware of the first sign of hearing stress—ringing in the ears. Protect against this by wearing hearing protection at all times on a firing range even if shooting alone or not shooting at all. Ear protection not only prevents hearing damage, but also makes it easier for you to concentrate while shooting. While you can choose from a variety of different styles of ear protection, some types are better than others. Foam earplugs are inexpensive and may reduce the noise by as much as 30 decibels, if inserted tightly enough to seal out sound. For maximum hearing protection, use insulated earmuffs with hard outer shells. These are the kinds of ear protection worn by heavy



equipment operators and construction workers.

Now explain that hunters should always wear shooting glasses while hunting. They protect your eyes from debris as well as from brush. Make sure the shooting glasses you choose have high-impact lenses. Yellow glasses may be unsafe to wear while hunting, since the yellow makes some shades of color look white, like the tail of a deer. Choose smoke, green, or brown tints for hunting. Keep your eyes moving across your field of vision. This reduces eye fatigue and helps you to see objects at the sides, as well as directly in your line of sight.



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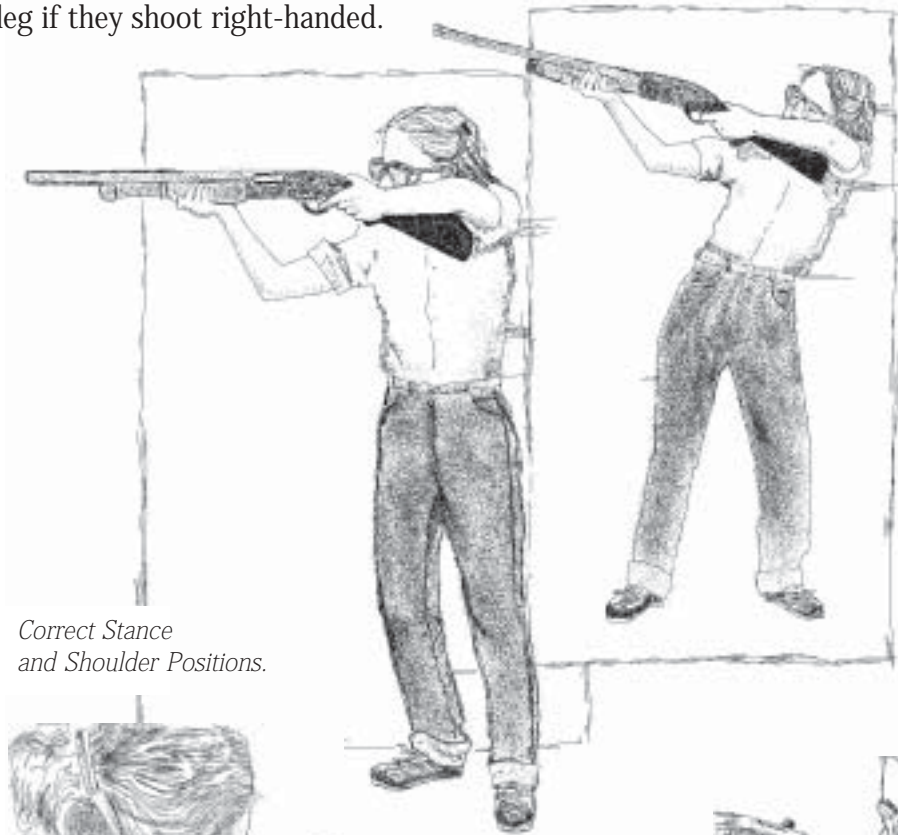
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As in the previous **Station #13 Bull's-Eye**, review the **10 Commandments of Shooting Safety**. Display, review and enforce these commandments at all shooting activities, whether in the field or on the range.



Before using the shotguns, explain that hunters need to properly stand and mount the shotgun to the shoulder. Have participants take turns using unloaded shotguns. Ask them to stand with their feet spread apart with one foot leading toward the target. They should feel well-balanced. Tell them that when it is time to shoot, they will shift their weight forward onto their front, or leading leg. This will be their left leg if they shoot right-handed.

The leading hand will hold the shotgun forward, pointing toward the target. The arm of their trigger finger should be held up with the elbow sticking out from the body at a 90-degree angle. Have them place the stock of the gun against their cheek first, and then against their shoulder. Tell them to avoid bringing the gun to their shoulder first and then moving their head down to the stock.



*Correct Stance
and Shoulder Positions.*

*Incorrect Stance
and Shoulder Positions.*

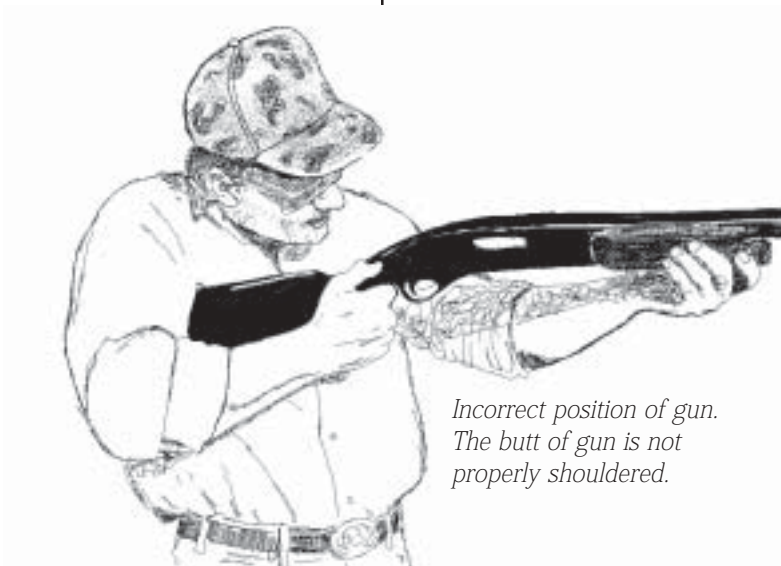


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Now demonstrate the use of one of the 20-gauge shotguns yourself. First show proper safety procedures such as wearing appropriate ear and eye protection. Then demonstrate the following steps:



*Incorrect position of gun.
The butt of gun is not
properly shouldered.*

- ☐ Make sure the gun's safety is in the "on" position.
- ☐ Load a 20-gauge shotshell into the chamber end of the barrel.
- ☐ Take the safety "off" when you are ready to shoot.

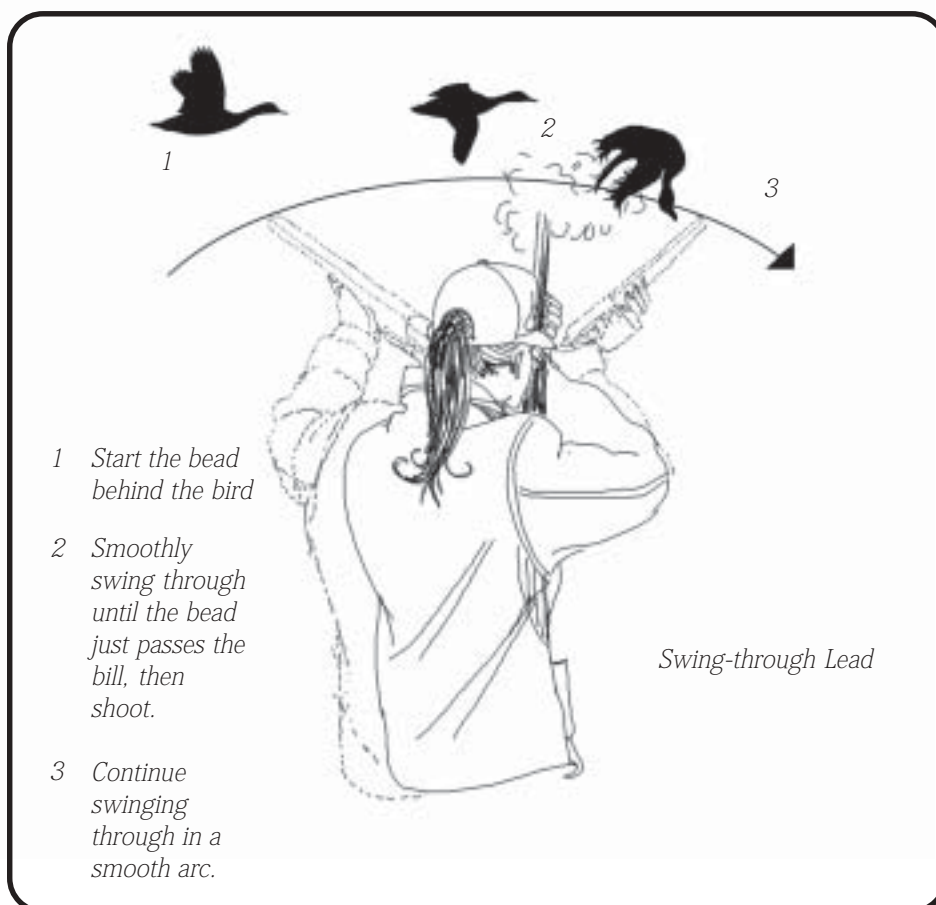
- ☐ Yell "pull" and the trap thrower will release the target.
- ☐ Follow and lead through past the leading edge of the target and then snap the trigger quickly.
- ☐ Keep both eyes open and point the gun rather than aim it.
- ☐ Follow through with your shot by continuing to swing in the direction your gun was moving when you shot.
- ☐ Put the safety back on.
- ☐ Eject the spent cartridge.
- ☐ Reload when Range Officer indicates it is safe to do so.

Further discuss the differences between shotgun and rifle shooting. Explain that with a rifle, the hunter aims it carefully at the target using one eye sighting down a scope or open sights. When the target is exactly positioned, the hunter slowly, steadily and gently squeezes the trigger. With a shotgun, the hunter points the shotgun in the general direction of the target, keeping both eyes open, follows the moving target, provides some lead distance in front of the bird or the rabbit and then quickly pulls or slaps the trigger.

Now explain the difference between **swing through lead** and **sustained lead**.

The **swing through lead** helps hunters avoid shooting behind the bird. It is the easiest method for beginning hunters to learn. In the swing through method of leading the shotgun, keep both eyes open, site down the barrel and start the bead behind the bird. Then smoothly and swiftly swing the gun until the bead just passes the bird's bill. At this point, fire your gun but continue to swing the

barrel fluidly in a smooth arc. Use the swing-through method for hunting birds that are flying in front of you, crossing from one side to the next. You can also use the swing-through method when shooting at birds, such as ducks, that fly overhead. These over-the-shoulder shots are some of the most difficult of all. As you swing through the bird, fire in front of the bird, just before it is directly overhead. If you wait longer than this, you won't be able to maintain a smooth swing.



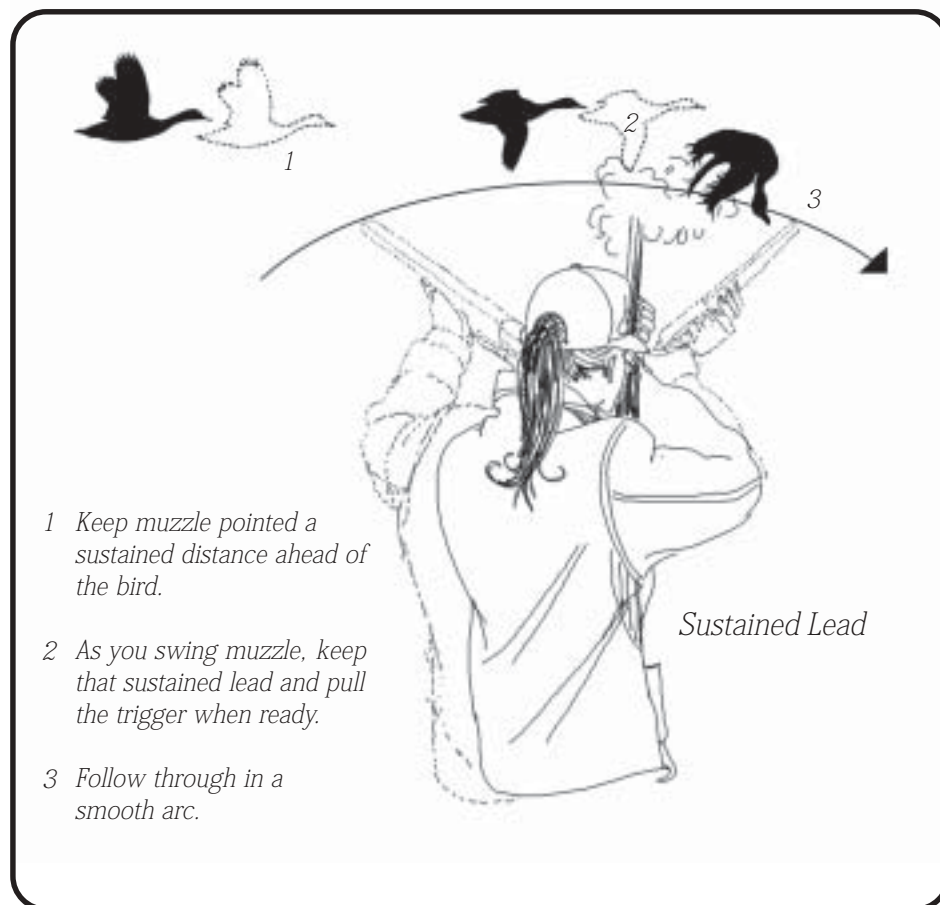
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The **sustained lead** is a technique that improves with experience. Essentially, the hunter must estimate the flight speed of the bird, its range and angle, and even the wind velocity. From this, the experienced hunter can estimate the amount of lead necessary. Then the hunter swings the muzzle that distance ahead of the bird, maintains this leading distance in front of the bird up to and after the shot is fired.

This is a good method when shooting at swift-flying birds from a long distance, such as over an open field or over open water. Sometimes ducks land head-on into your decoys, or they jump up out of the water. Other times, a rooster may flush straight up out of the field cover in front of you. For these scenarios, a hunter put's the bead on the bird's bill and pulls the trigger.



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After explaining these techniques of shooting birds on the wing, it's time to allow your participants a chance of actually firing a shotgun.

You may want the participants to first practice using the dry firing technique. This means walking them through all the steps above, but without any ammunition in the gun. They practice closing the shotgun's action on an empty chamber and then proceed through the remaining steps.

Allow your group to observe the clay target thrower in action before they shoot. Assist participants in correct shooting positions at each station.

Allow participants to fire five rounds with a shotgun at each station.



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References

All About the Shooting Sports, National Shooting Sports Foundation (brochure).

Hunter's Clays...where targets fly like game birds, National Shooting Sports Foundation (brochure).

